DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 044 JC 900 477

TITLE	Good Practices in Transfer Education: Report from a Survey Conducted by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges and the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer. Transfer Working Papers, Volume 1, Number 3, October 1990.
INSTITUTION	American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Washington, D.C.; American Council on Education, Washington, DC. National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer.
SPONS AGENCY	Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	90
NOTE	8p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
JOURNAL CIT	Transfer Working Papers; v1 n3 Oct 1990
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Articulation (Education); *College Transfer Students; Community Colleges; *Data Collection; Higher Education; National Surveys; Research Methodology; *Transfer Policy; *Transfer Programs; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students

ABSTRACT

In April 1990, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges and the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer conducted a national survey of 1,366 regionally accredited, degree-granting, two-year public and private colleges to identify practices used to foster and encourage student transfer to senior institutions. Institutions were asked to describe the frequency with which they employed various transfer strategies, their method of identifying transfer students, and their approach to calculating institutional transfer statistics. Study findings, based on a 39.4% response rate, included the following: (1) the institutions utilized written articulation agreements (85%), course equivalency guides (81%), and transfer counselors (81%); (2) additional transfer strategies employed included joint degree programs, dual registration, transfer information centers, intercollegiate relations commissions, and guaranteed admissions to receiving institutions; (3) the most popular methods used to identify students who transferred were graduate follow-up surveys, estimates/guesses, state reporting systems, documentation of transcript requests, and information obtained from senior institutions; and (4) most institutions based transfer statistics on recent associate degree graduates or students enrolled in transfer curricula, producing higher transfer rates than institutions considering the entire student population in estimating transfer rates. Recommendations for future research are included. (GFW)

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WORKING PAPERS

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 3
OCTOBER 1990

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GOOD PRACTICES IN TRANSFER EDUCATION

REPORT FROM A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES AND THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND TRANSFER

BACKGROUND

Transfer education, the capacity of community, technical, and junior colleges to assist students in the transition to a four-year college or university, has historically been an important element within the mission of many of these institutions. The emphasis in the 1980s on academic reform and assessment and the growing concern for the educational mobility of minority students in higher education have resulted in a national focus on the effectiveness of transfer education in community, technical, and junior colleges which include transfer in their statements of mission. This interest has been expressed through a variety of reports, articles, and monographs attempting to describe and analyze the extent of transfer activity, the management of transfer, and the importance of transfer in two-year institutions. Many of these documents suffer from a lack of adequate data and information about transfer activity at the national, state, and institutional level.

The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) and the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer (established and funded by The Ford Foundation and sponsored by the American Council on Education) seek to develop reliable documentation of transfer activity throughout the country. The Center and AACJC, in April, 1990, undertook a National Survey to identify practices used by regionally accredited, degree-granting, two-year public and private colleges to foster and encourage student transfer to senior institutions. Institutions were asked to describe the frequency with which they employed various transfer strategies, their method of identifying transfer students, and their approach to establishing transfer rates.

A word of caution: This Survey does not offer a national rate of transfer. Differences in data collection practices, varying descriptions of "transfer," and the limitations of available data all prevent a national rate of transfer activity from being established at this time. The Survey confirms serious limitations associated with data collection and analysis and some confusion in relation to defining a transfer population. The Survey challenges community, technical, and junior colleges to address these issues.

SUMMARY

Transfer Practices: Institutions responding to this Survey rely on traditional student support services and written interinstitutional arrangements (articulation agreements) to manage transfer. Less emphasis is placed on managing transfer in ways that involve faculty and academic departments. The relationship between transfer and teaching has not been fully explored.

Describing Transfer Activity: Institutions employ a broad range of strategies to identify those students who transfer to a four-year school. These include follow-up surveys, documentation of transcript requests, and information obtained from receiving institutions about transfer students. There is limited reliance on any single strategy to routinely obtain reliable information about the transfer behavior of the student population.

Determining Institutional Transfer Rates: Institutions use a variety of definitions of their respective transfer populations. This results in the establishment of widely varying approaches to calculating transfer rates. Little uniformity among institutions regarding the development of definitions of transfer and the establishment of institutional transfer rates emerges in this Survey.

GOALS OF THE SURVEY

The Survey includes the 1366 institutions identified on the American Council on Education list of regionally accredited, degree-granting, two-year public and private institutions. Each received a questionnaire directed to the Chief Academic Officer of the college. The response to the Survey was encouraging: 538 institutions provided usable responses which represented 39.4% of the questionnaires mailed to the colleges. The 538 schools included large and small institutions from all over the country. The response group reflected the broad range of students served by community, junior, and technical colleges.

The Survey asked the institutions to:

- identify the various strategies and practices on which they relied to manage transfer;
- describe how they identified the number and percentage of students who transfer to senior institutions;
- describe how they determine an institutional transfer rate for the student population.

TRANSFER PRACTICES

Of the eleven choices offered by the Survey, responding institutions identified an average of six transfer practices. The majority of institutions made use of standard student support services and institutional articulation arrangements to manage transfer. The most frequently employed practices were

- written articulation agreements (85% of institutions);
- course equivalency guides (81% of institutions);
- transfer counselors (81% of institutions).

A number of institutions indicated reliance on departmental and faculty collaboration. The collaborative practices which were identified varied greatly among institutions:

- 2yr-4yr departmental collaboration(60% of institutions);
- 2yr-4yr faculty collaboration(45% of institutions).

The respondent institutions were least likely to use academically driven practices to manage transfer:

- joint degree programs (33% of institutions);
- dual registration (28% of institutions).

TABLE 1

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES FOR ASSISTING STUDENT TRANSFER TO FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

PRACTICE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Written Articulation Agreements*	456	85%
Course Equivalency Guides	437	81
Transfer Counselors and Advisors	434	81
Informal Articulation	392	73
2yr-4yr Departmental Collaboration	323	60
Transfer or 4yr College Days	320	60
Special Treatment in College Catalog	304	57
2yr-4yr Faculty Collaboration	243	45
Transfer Scholarships	241	45
Joint Degree Program	177	33
Dual Registration	152	28

* State Agreements: 116, Local Agreements: 112, Both: 228

Institutions were also requested to describe other practices used in helping students transfer. They identified the following:

- Transfer information centers;
- Computerized course transfer information services;
- Articulated core curricula for transfer students;
- Specific intercollege relations commissions;
- Guaranteed admissions to receiving institutions.

IDENTIFYING TRANSFER ACTIVITY

The colleges reported a variety of approaches to identifying transfer activity. The Survey classified these methods into seven distinct categories and an eighth grouping representing various combinations of the seven categories. These categories are broadly inclusive and cannot begin to represent the varying practices which were reported within each category. The most frequently employed approaches were:

- Follow-up survey of graduates (21% of institutions);
- Estimate or guess (11% of institutions);
- State reporting system (10% of institutions);
- Number of transcript requests (9% of institutions).

The most popular approach to collecting information was to survey graduates. Surveys were approached in different ways. Some institutions asked their students at the time of graduation about their transfer plans. A few schools conducted follow-up surveys after graduation to obtain information about where their students transferred. A very few colleges surveyed all students who left regardless of graduation, while most surveyed associate degree completers only. Many colleges only considered students in transfer-oriented curricula as their survey population.

Graduate surveys which involved obtaining information from four-year receiving institutions varied greatly. For example, colleges in Florida, California, Colorado, and North Carolina were able to obtain information about their students from state university systems. Other schools worked directly with one or more receiving institutions. A few schools combined several approaches in order to identify transfer students. These approaches did not include students who transfer to private and out-of-state institutions and thus tend to underrepresent the number of students transferring.

TABLE 2

METHODS FOR DETERMINING NUMBERS OF STUDENTS TRANSFERRING

Method Employed	Number Using	Percentage
Follow-up Survey of Graduates	111	21%
Estimate or Guess	57	11
State Reporting System	54	10
Number of Transcript Requests	50	9
Feedback from a Number of 4yr Colleges	35	6
Reports from In-state Colleges	29	5
Data from Registrar and Other Offices	26	5
Combination of 2 or More of Above	29	6
No Response to the Question	147	27
Total	538	100%

ESTIMATING AN INSTITUTIONAL RATE OF TRANSFER

There were several different methods used by institutions to estimate the numbers and the percentages of students who transferred. Some considered only those persons enrolled in transfer curricula as their transfer population, while others used all students enrolled in the college. Most schools considered only recent associate degree graduates and ignored students who left before completing the degree. The students included in the potential transfer population have a significant impact on transfer rates. For example, if College A considered only associate of arts degree graduates in transfer curricula and determined how many of this group transferred, College A would most likely have a much higher transfer rate than College B which considered all students enrolled in all curricula at the college not returning for the following semester. At the same time, College A would most likely underrepresent the absolute number of persons transferring by not considering those who transfer before graduating and those who transfer from career curricula.

AREAS OF ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION AND STUDY

Sharing Transfer Practices: Further explanation and documentation of institutional transfer practices would provide colleges with fresh ideas about improving transfer. Information about the less traditional ways colleges are using to enhance transfer such as joint curricular efforts, teacher exchanges, and joint admissions needs attention as well as the use of student support services and articulation arrangements.

Academic Collaboration: Faculty-to-faculty ties and other academic arrangements between the two-year college and the transfer institution need to be established. Such activities could lead to the development of more formalized and coherent curricular arrangements that could greatly facilitate transfer. This collaboration can lead to curriculum redesign and redevelopment, changes in pedagogical practices associated with transfer, and direct intervention with students to develop cognitive skills needed for transfer. Existing articulation arrangements can be augmented by renewed faculty involvement in the two-year/four-year relationship.

Transfer Data Collection: Procedures to identify the transfer student population need to be established. This involves routine data collection, longitudinal follow-up of students who transfer and definition of the transfer population. Institutions need guidance in developing and managing their transfer data base.

Transfer Effectiveness: More attention needs to be paid to establishing institutional transfer rates as a basis for establishing institutional transfer effectiveness. This requires agreement about the definition of a transfer population. Given the establishment of an institutional transfer rate, institutional transfer goals can be identified and schools can proceed to evaluate the extent to which they realize these goals.

National Transfer Rate: The reporting of a national rate of transfer is not possible from this Survey given the difficulties associated with gathering transfer data and defining the transfer population. The establishment of a national rate of transfer would be of significant value to colleges. This would require serious attention to data collection and analysis. A generally accepted definition of transfer is needed to establish institutional transfer rates as a foundation for a national transfer profile.

Survey responses were compiled and analyzed by Dr. Aram L. Terzian, Division Dean, Community College of Philadelphia.

For further information, please contact:

Judith Eaton, Vice President
and Director, National Center
for Academic Achievement
and Transfer, American Council
on Education, 202-939-9715

Enid B. Jones, Director of
Research and Executive
Director, Minority Education
Commission, American
Association of Community
and Junior Colleges,
202-728-0200

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